

Vindicating Jeremy Corbyn

By [Megan Sherman](#)

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By now the apocalyptic metaphor for Jeremy Corbyn has crept through the doors of our consciousness. The tendency in the press to describe the unlikely leader in foreboding words which contain a warning: toxic; dangerous; destroy; risk, has gone in to overload. There's always a warning attached to Corbyn. He will doom Labour at the ballot box; he's a threat to your nan; if you say his name three times the ghost of Trotsky will appear, collectivize your cat and steal your taxes. This circus of fear isn't just misleading: when Corbyn is trying to shine a light on the troublesome logic of government policy, on the nightmare that austerity and privatization creates, it shuts down dialogue before it can even get started.

Mainstream media renderings of Jeremy Corbyn tell us he has travelled through a wormhole that leads back to 1970, to drag us all back kicking and screaming in to an age of unbridled left-wing lunacy. In truth, like most 'golden ages' alluded to in politics, the reality is often more complex than the mythologizing which hides it. A lot seems odd about the reasoning of the debunkers. Firstly the issue that the chief problem is Corbyn's obsolescence, rather than the reverse: precisely because of the way global debates on security, warfare, climate change and inequality are escalating, throwing 21st century challenges in to sharp relief, Corbyn's ideas on rail and energy nationalisation, trident renewal and redistributive justice are ever salient. What should the era of an idea matter anyway? It made sense to left-wing activists in the sixties and seventies to protest the fact that the war economy hoovers up resources that might instead be devoted to helping people. Why can't it make sense now? If anything those beliefs have been vindicated by time. You'd hope the idea that libraries, schools, hospitals and nurses do more good than bombs didn't just die on January 1st 1980.

As for introducing Hamas as "friends", one senses the alternative phrasing, "our enemies in Hamas", may have escalated tensions somewhat. Corbyn's choice was simply politic. There is a better reason why his bedfellows stir controversy, and that is when they are at odds with humanitarian principles. For example Corbyn's refusal to speak out on regimes like Russia and Iran, which violate principles of justice by persecuting LGBTQI citizens, is horrendously out of touch.

Nevertheless he has done good to challenge the UK government for its collusion with Saudi Arabia, an extremist regime notorious for its abuse of human rights and to whom we nevertheless have a policy of selling guns and bombs. Arguably the UN has bastardized the whole legacy of humanitarianism by inviting Saudi Arabia to sit on its human rights council. It is horrifying to think that the (dubiously named) Ministry of Justice in the UK is being contracted to make Saudi Arabia's disgusting penal system more efficient, at a time when human rights activists are campaigning for the release of Ali Mohammed al-Nimr, a teenager sentenced to death for his involvement with anti-government protests. Jeremy Corbyn can be a force for good if he can keep applying diplomatic pressure and expose the pernicious

influence of the Saudis on government policy.

Despite his high ideals he will doom us at the ballot box, say many. Of course Labour has to fight elections, but is that its central political task? If seizing the centre and capturing the average voter means capitulating to the portfolio and rhetoric of the Conservatives, it is mind-boggling why anyone would want to try. Obviously Blair did it, and sold Labour's soul for peanuts. But there is no reason Labour should ever again ditch people power for parliamentary privilege, and ditch progress for politics.

Elections matter, but there is another battle, to build a mass movement for social justice sustainable on the local level, to win back the population for whom Labour was once an authentic opposition to the status quo but morphed in to a spooky robot replica of the Conservatives. Labour shouldn't just rely on elections, but should equally support the struggle of trade unions, campaign groups and students aspiring in earnest to eliminate poverty and injustice from the world. There's a whole generation of young people who want to change the state of democracy and struggle for peace and freedom who have found cause for hope in Corbyn, and his success in galvanizing this generation is a great illustration of how progressive principles of the past can still have meaning for people today.

People may accuse Labour of being stuck in the past but the truth is that we are still fighting Thatcher. We have a choice between the neoliberal society, organized by markets and private ownership and run for the benefit of a few self-serving plutocrats, or a socialist democracy, putting power in people's hands to end the blight of war and division. Thatcher's triumph was to convince the political class that "there is no alternative" to her Rayndian social engineering. New Labour embraced the essentials of the consensus. She herself said Blair was her greatest success. And every now and then a Blairite will rise up in a bubble of hot air to spew invective over the people's protest, to try and kill off the Corbyn conga. But socialism is back. The struggle of progressives to reveal the truth, that "another world is possible", has won, and the establishment hates it. And that is why they crank out phoney propaganda, and ask us if Jeremy Corbyn wins, would the last person who leaves Britain turn the lights out. Because it sits very, very uneasily with them that even if the all the lights did go out, more and more people are following Jeremy Corbyn, who may be a blind man leading the blind, but leading with the light of socialism in his heart.

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